

Rezensionen zum Themenschwerpunkt

Alice Primi, **Femmes de progrès: Françaises et Allemandes engagées dans leur siècle 1848–1870**. Préface de Michèle Riot-Sarcey (= Archives du féminisme), Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes 2010, 317 p., EUR 20,-, ISBN 978-2-7535-1044-9.

Alice Primi's dense, engaging work investigates and compares French and German women's activism in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a period bounded by the revolutions of 1848 and the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. By examining the multiple and varied strands of feminist engagements on both sides of the Rhine, "Femmes de progrès" gives lie to the conception of these as years essentially devoid of feminisms. Alice Primi deftly employs gender analysis, still often absent from the Francophone historiography. She explains the necessity of gender analysis for historicising the concept of "woman", as well as for "contextualising the relations between the sexes within the history of power relations" (17).¹ The author centres the concepts of gender identity and gender consciousness within her study, using them to better understand both the range of strategies activist women used to access the public sphere, and feminists' disparate conceptions of politics.

In concert with gender analysis, the author utilises a comparative framework, an approach infrequently used in women's and gender history. Alice Primi contrasts French and German feminists and feminisms, carefully examining each within its particular national milieu and dominant political and gender ideologies, while fruitfully comparing the two national contexts. She convincingly argues that the combination of gender analysis and a comparative framework enables the "deconstruction of models of femininity presented as 'universal' as well as those presented as 'national', and aids in historicising the construction of gendered categories" (26). These approaches effectively reveal the links between gender and national identity, illuminating the historical and temporal specificities of the era's French and German gender constructs. Addressing national differences, "Femmes de progrès" shows how the German movements focused primarily on women's place in the emerging national project, while the French emphasised gendered ideas of liberty consistent with their historical tradition. Combining

1 All translations are those of the review's author.

chronological and thematic structure, Alice Primi probes the associations, literature, and journalism that activist women on both sides of the Rhine employed in their efforts to “belong to their century, to show themselves as worthy of their times, to serve their epoch [...] to participate with all in the advent of Progress” (27).

Following an excellent introduction which lays out the book’s methodological and theoretical approaches, the study is divided into three long chapters, with multiple usefully-subheaded distinct sections. “Femmes de progress” first addresses the 1848 Revolutionary era; then the mid-1850s–1860s, often considered the “time of silence”; and finally 1868–1870, years of relative liberalisation and increasing turmoil. In the German case, feminists asserted the existence of a ‘national character’ for their activism, a relatively moderate, traditionally gendered effort to expand women’s public role, while rarely claiming political rights. During the years building toward German unification, activist women endeavored to carve a space and develop a role for themselves in the emergent nation. Alice Primi shows how they sought participation in the progress toward nationhood, asserting themselves as dynamic, though specifically gendered, participants in their century. Consciously avoiding the language of ‘emancipation’, which was closely associated with an immoral liberty and specifically with French women’s movements and their revolutionary connections, German women constructed their identities as distinctly feminine and clearly ‘not French’. In contrast, French feminists did not appear to look across the Rhine when developing their identities. Rather French women harkened back to their own Revolutionary heritage, which evolved from the relative mysticism and essentialism of the utopian feminists of 1848, to an individual rights-based feminism during the late 1860s. While Alice Primi does not directly state this, she presents German feminists as nationally relational, and French feminists as nationally individual, forming and asserting their stances based on their domestic histories. Yet the author neither clarifies this implication nor explains how activist French women perceived their German counterparts.

The book carefully analyses the journalism, literature, and associationism that comprised the ways in which the title’s “Femmes de progrès [...] engaged in their century”. Limited in their public and political involvements over the period by post-1848 backlash and repression, sexist legal and social structures, and marginalisation within male-dominated parties and organisations, women like the German Louise Otto and Fanny Lewald, and the French Eugénie Niboyet and André Léo, published newspapers, wrote novels and essays, formed their own organisations, and pressed for female inclusion in mixed-sex groups, working to expand women’s voices and influence. Interrogating the ways in which authors and organisers shaped their publications and engagements over the period, the text elucidates the varied and specific strategies feminists used within shifting political climates and under intensifying censorship and repression. The in-depth, thoroughly documented research illuminates the complexity of women’s activism across an era which, Alice Primi contends, “‘women’s history’ has generally neglected [...] considering it as a sort of pause between the activism of 1848 and the

emergence of feminist organisations” (16). While this is the case in the French-language historiography, the author has neglected to consider the Anglophone feminist scholarship on the period, including works by Claire Goldberg Moses and Bonnie S. Anderson, as well as my own work. “Femmes de progress” undoubtedly makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of women’s mid-century activism, but the contribution would be notably richer if the study included these and other relevant English-language studies.

Alice Primi’s detailed investigation usefully reveals both the deeply gendered political contexts of mid-nineteenth century France and Germany, and the gender-conscious ways in which activist women navigated these years. The book carefully demonstrates fascinating continuities and discontinuities as well as similarities and contrasts, among a broad range of activist women and feminist movements both chronologically and internationally. Yet the conclusion reverses and undermines much of the important work of the text. It argues, erroneously, that “the engaged authors examined here aspired to be ‘girls of their century’ [...] but when all was said and done were invisible to their contemporaries [...]. The few intransigent individuals [...] who proposed real alternatives to what was considered the ineluctable movement of history, are not only misunderstood, but ultimately completely marginalised”. (278) How and why would such “invisible” women generate the substantial and vociferous contestation and opposition these women encountered during their lives? And the ongoing activism of women including André Léo, Juliette Lamber, and Louise Otto, as well as the international influence and legacies of others such as Jeanne Deroin and Mathilde Anneke, defies description as “ultimately completely marginalised” (278). Documentary and scholarly evidence shows that the contemporary and longer-term significance of these brave and influential activists deserves greater recognition than they receive here.

Despite these problems, “Femmes de progrès” is an engrossing book that makes important methodological, empirical, and analytical contributions to the field. Alice Primi’s archival research is first rate, and her impressive employment of an inter-linked gender analysis and comparative framework result in a valuable scholarly piece.

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Judith Sapor, Andrea Pető, Maura Hametz u. Marina Calloni Hg., **Jewish Intellectual Women in Central Europe 1860–2000: Twelve Biographical Essays**, New York: Edwin Mellen Press 2012, 432 S., ca. EUR 117,-, ISBN 978-0-773-42933-8.

Der vorliegende Sammelband biographischer Essays zu jüdischen weiblichen Intellektuellen stößt geographisch wie konzeptionell in eine Forschungslücke: Porträtiert werden, chronologisch nach Geburtsjahr, zwölf Frauen aus Mitteleuropa, die zwischen 1861 und 1902 geboren wurden und so Zeitgenossinnen der Frauenbewegung, der